

**What is fluoride?**

Fluoride is a natural element found in air, soil, fresh water, sea water, plants and many foods. Known to protect against tooth decay, fluoride is recognized as an important component of dental health.

**What is water fluoridation?**

In some communities, the level of fluoride that naturally occurs in water is lower than the level known to benefit dental health. To correct this, some communities use water fluoridation – adding fluoride to the municipal water supply as part of the water treatment process – to ensure that water has a fluoride level that protects teeth from decay. Once added to water, the fluoride used in water fluoridation is no different than naturally-occurring fluoride.

**Is water fluoridation effective?**

Since the 1940s and 1950s scientific studies by independent researchers have shown that oral health in communities with water fluoridation is better than the oral health in communities with very low water fluoride levels. Almost always, communities with optimal water fluoride levels have more cavity-free children, and the children who have had decay have less of it. Water fluoridation also works to limit tooth decay in adults, and has an additional positive effect beyond that of using fluoridated toothpaste.

**Who benefits from water fluoridation?**

Water fluoridation is of most benefit to children and those most at risk of tooth decay. As more Albertans keep their teeth for life, everyone benefits from community water fluoridation – regardless of age, income or education level. It is a simple, safe, cost-effective way to improve oral health.

**Can water fluoridation harm people?**

Scientific studies have **not** found water fluoridation to cause adverse health effects.

Consuming too much fluoride from any source when teeth are developing may cause enamel fluorosis. Fluorosis is not a health condition, but rather an aesthetic marking of tooth/tooth enamel. Fluorosis ranges in degree from ‘very mild’ to ‘severe’, and the great majority of cases associated with water fluoridation are ‘very mild’ and ‘mild’. Moderate and higher levels of fluorosis are usually the result of individuals having swallowing fluoridated toothpaste when young. Water fluoridation uses less than one thousandth as much fluoride as fluoridated toothpaste. The level of fluoride in water is set to best protect from decay and from risk of fluorosis. Overall rates of enamel fluorosis are declining in Alberta.

**What about personal choice? What if I don’t want fluoride in my water?**

It is important to remember that fluoride is naturally occurring in water, even in communities where water is not fluoridated. However, if fluoride-free water is desired, there is more water choice than ever before: supermarkets sell non-fluoridated water in bulk that people can choose to purchase at quite low cost. People can also make the choice to use reverse osmosis filters and steam distillers at home, to remove fluoride from tap water. On the other hand, adequate and appropriate oral health care remains inaccessible for many children and low income families – they have little personal choice when it comes to their dental health.